

Kokul on the Trinity

Does the Trinity Make Sense

Gregory Koukl

Some people say the Trinity—the idea that there is one God Who subsists in three fully distinct but fully divine persons—doesn't make sense. This depends entirely on what one means by the concept of making "sense."

If one means that the Trinity is irrational, that it violates some law of reason, then the challenge is simply false. There is no violation of the laws of reason in the Trinity. Anyone who thinks I'm mistaken on this point must identify the specific law being breached in light of the orthodox teaching on the Trinity (as opposed to some misrepresentation; we don't believe in three gods, for example).

One might argue that the Trinity doesn't make sense in that it doesn't appeal to any sense perception, that it's hard to conceptualize the Trinity because it can't be pictured in the mind. This seems accurate, but it's hardly relevant. Individual spiritual beings—God, angels, souls—can't be pictured. Though they may manifest themselves in physical form (we find this in the Bible), this is not what they actually look like. Even so, the concepts are certainly intelligible.

The same is true with immaterial things like love, kindness, or vengeance. Each of these may be evidenced in actions that can be seen, but they are not themselves physical, and indeed no accurate physical characterization or "sense" of them can even be imagined.

So, it is no liability that no one can picture the Trinity. It is not "sensible" in that way. This tells you nothing about the truth of the doctrine. That question is answered by a different means: Does God's own self-revelation give us reason to believe that the doctrine of the Trinity, classically understood, is an accurate and true description, as far as it goes, of God's nature? The answer to that is clearly yes.

The Trinity Solves Problems

Gregory Koukl

Greg answers a caller's challenge that the Christian view of the Trinity is not scriptural.

Now I'm going to take a minute to walk through some important things with you folks. It's very important that you understand how to resolve a tricky issue that was raised about the Trinity. I'm going to walk through it very clearly so you can understand what I'm trying to do. The particular question that came up was that my view, or the Christian view, of the Trinity is inconsistent with the Scripture. That was the objection. That's why John 20 was raised as a verse and a number of other verses were raised as contradicting the orthodox notion of the Trinity. In fact, it was questioned as whether such a thing could be an orthodox notion because Jesus Himself didn't teach it.

Now it's clear that Jesus did not teach the Trinity as I would teach the Trinity because it's synthetic in that it's taking a number of different things and synthesizing them into a doctrine. But the synthesis is legitimate if each of those things is actually taught in the Scripture. In fact, in the case of the hypostatic union the full humanness and the full divinity of Jesus Christ were both taught by Him.

Now, if the objection is against my view or the Christian view, and the objection is that it doesn't fit the Scripture, you have to have two things before you resolve this. First of all, you must have a clear understanding of what my view is that you say is contradictory. The second thing you must have is you must work with the Scripture. That's where you must start and that's where you must end if the objection is that the view is not Scriptural. Do you follow that? That's why you start with the Bible and you end with the Bible and not with Joseph Smith or anyone else for that matter. That's not what the question is about. We're not talking about Joseph Smith's view of God. We're talking about whether the Bible teaches a particular thing so we go to the Bible. We take this definition that we have that allegedly is not Biblical, and we attempt to see whether anything in the Bible conflicts with the definition as we hold it.

The definition of the Trinity is this: there is one God, one Being who is God and only God; yet that one God has three different Persons, separate *personas*, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Son is referred to as the Word in John 1. That's our view. Our view is not that the

Father is the same as the Son. Our view is that the Father is not the Son. Our view is that the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. But that all are equally God. They possess everything that makes God God. They have God's nature and can be called God, yet there is only one God.

Some people might say that this doesn't make sense. It depends entirely on what you mean when you say it doesn't make sense. It's not that it's irrational. There is nothing contradictory by the laws of reason in the Trinity. Absolutely not. Now it may not make sense because you have a hard time picturing this. Is this some kind of three-headed beast? I can't picture it in my mind.

Why is it that you can't accept the truthfulness of something if you can't image it in your mind? Tell me what love looks like. Tell me what God looks like. You can't image God in your mind. In fact, you are prohibited from trying to do so. The First Commandment, by the way. You can't image God. You can't image love. You can't image justice. But we have good reason to believe they are real things and we know that. So it is not a liability because we can't image the Trinity in our mind. What we need to find out is if it is taught. And the teaching of the Trinity is there is one God and there are three Persons. And Jesus Christ is the second Person, fully human and fully divine.

So then we go to the Bible and we see the verse that was cited, John 20. This seems to indicate that Jesus is a human being and that He is different from the Father because He calls God "My God". I say, what's the problem with that? Well, you see, Jesus is different from the Father. My response is, you're right, He is. He's a different Person. But is He a different Being? No, it doesn't say that. If you flip the page to John 20, there is Thomas calling Jesus God. Since there is only one God in the Bible, Jesus must be that God that is the only God. We have His divinity right there, and we have His separateness the page before. We look in the beginning of the Gospel of John and we have Jesus being identified as the Word, being called God in the very first verse. We see in the third verse that He is identified as the Creator of all things. We see in the 14th verse that this Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. That's the human being. This is not tricky. There is no subterfuge here. There is no slight of hand. I am simply reading the verses.

What is hard is when we read these things and we say, how can such things be? How can Jesus be God and talk to the Father as Someone separate at the same time because God is one Being and three Persons?

None of these verses are a problem for me because they all fit my definition perfectly. That's why I say the Trinity is not a problem. It's a solution. If you don't believe in the Trinity, you've got a problem. You can stand firmly on the verses that identify the distinction between the Father and the Son and say, See there it is. I tiptoe over to John 1 and say, What is this business where it says the Word was God and the Word created all things, and then the Word became flesh and dwelt among us? Then someone says something really silly, pardon me, like, "Maybe that's the Gospel message that is called God that created all things and that dwelt among us." I don't get it. You don't have to say something silly. That's the reason we believe in the Trinity because it's right there. It's the only explanation that brings all of the statements about the person, the character and the nature of Jesus into harmony. Any other position creates tremendous problems, like I just said. And this is what bothers me.

I ought to go on the offensive more often on this. I stand and I keep answering these questions. How could Jesus call God His Father? How could Jesus talk to the Father? I should say, It's easy. It's not a problem from my view of the Trinity. It doesn't conflict.

I think people who raise those questions either don't or refuse to take our definitions at face value. The caller said, You define things and you control the argument. Wait a minute. That misses the point. The objection is specifically to my definition anyway. That's what this whole thing is about, so let's stick to my definition if that's the objection. My definition fits clearly. Instead of saying this fits, this fits, this fits, I should ask, like I did eventually, What the heck do you think it means when it says that the Word was God, that He created all things, when Thomas falls on his face and worships Jesus and Jesus applauds him for it? How do you make sense out of that?

Well, then you start hearing stories. Bedtime stories. Invented fairy tales meant to put your argument to rest. But the fairy tale doesn't fit the words of the text. The fairy tale may fit with what some other alleged prophet of God happened to say about the nature of God. Fine. If you want to follow him, that's up to you. But don't for a minute suggest that that teaching matches what the Scripture says. It does not. The Scripture speaks clearly on this issue. Any other solution is no solution at all.

The Trinity is not a problem. It solves the problems.